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GENERAL VON BISSING'S TESTAMENT:

2077

A STUDY IN GERMAN IDEALS

Bissing, Moritz Ferdinand
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General Von Bissing's Testament:

A Study in German Ideals

"It is the grossest calumny to suggest that Michaelis, or even the most ardent German Chauvinist thinks of annexing Belgium." [*Leipziger Tageblatt*, July 24th, 1917.]

"A man of the importance of Governor-General von Bissing, as late as January last, described his conception, and that of the influential circles at his side, in the well-known letter to Dr. Stresemann. He says in this letter: 'A memorandum composed for my own use by me lies before the House. It deals thoroughly with the future of Belgium, and without hesitation comes to this conclusion: If we do not win Belgium for Germany into our power-sphere, if we do not manage it and use it in German fashion, the war is lost.' (Interruption.) Oh, Herr Keil, so that is already disposed of. One must have a faith which can remove mountains to believe that the views of Herr von Bissing, who is unhappily deceased, and of those who shared these views, have been disposed of." [Speech of Hr. Haase in the Reichstag, July 19th, 1917.]

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
General von Bissing's Testament ...	13
Appendix I.—Von Bissing's Letter to Dr. Stresemann	30
,, II.—Letter of Hr. Bacmeister	34
,, III.—Extracts from von Bissing's Letter to Hr. Cornelius Gurlitt	35

INTRODUCTION

SHORTLY after General von Bissing's death, one of his friends, Hr. M. W. Bacmeister, a member of the Reichstag, published a memorandum signed by the ex-Governor General of Belgium. This document appeared at the same time in *Das Grössere Deutschland* (May 19th, 1917) and in the *Bergisch Märkische Zeitung* (May 18th, 1917).

In order to appreciate its full importance, in the light of recent political and diplomatic events, a few words of introduction are necessary.

The first thing which will strike the reader is the flagrant contradiction existing between General von Bissing's views concerning Belgium and the various declarations made implicitly or explicitly, since the beginning of the war, by the various representatives of the German Government, from the earlier speeches of von Bethmann Hollweg to the last utterances of the Kaiser. In all these declarations it has been stated over and over again that Germany is waging a purely defensive war, and that she has no intention of annexing Belgium: "I never indicated among our war aims," said the German Chancellor, speaking before the Central Committee of the Reichstag, " that we intended to annex Belgium " (November 9th, 1916). Two months later, in his

note to President Wilson, Herr Zimmermann, th
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, is still mo
emphatic. Referring to the recent declaration
the Chancellor, he writes that " the annexation
Belgium has never been intended by Germany."

He adds, of course, that " Germany want
merely to take some precautions in order that thi
country (Belgium), with which the Imperial Govern
ment wish to entertain relations of good neighbour
hood, could not be used by their enemies, in orde
to further aggressive military operations " (Januar
31st, 1917). This is very likely what Dr. Michaeli
intends to convey, in his recent speech, when he talk
about making Germany's frontiers secure, and wha
the Kaiser implies when he proclaims to his troop
that Germany is fighting for her existence. But such
suggestions remain so vague and ambiguous that the
misinformed public remains under the impression tha
Belgium's independence is not at stake, whatever the
conclusion of the war may be.

How wrong such an impression is is sufficiently
proved by the tone of von Bissing's political testa-
ment and the various letters appended to it.

Here is a man enjoying the Emperor's confidence,
placed by him at the head of the administration of
the conquered territories, who openly advocates the
complete and unreserved annexation of Belgium to
the Empire. It is, according to him, Germany's
" sacred duty " to keep the territories which she has
won at such a heavy price. King Albert must be
dethroned, military dictatorship must reign supreme

during long years to come, the country's independence must never be restored, the properties of the exiled must be confiscated and there must be imposed a *régime* of blood and iron which will make Germany's rule in Alsace-Lorraine and the Polish provinces look foolishly weak. Such is the gist of the manifesto.

The ex-Governor deprecates any half measures or conciliatory methods which might be contemplated in some moderate German quarters: Liége and Namur (the line of the Meuse) are not enough; Germany must hold Antwerp and the coast as well; the exchange of Belgium against the German colonies cannot for one moment be contemplated; the Walloon population must come under German rule as well as the Flemish; and even to the latter, who are supposed to be more friendly to the Empire, complete independence can on no account be granted. If the Empire loses Belgium, whatever advantages she may obtain in other quarters, Germany has lost the war.

There is no room left for a doubt: never has a more forcible plea for the annexation of Belgium been made in a more overbearing style. The ex-Governor does not dwell on the question of defensive war, but he grows very eloquent when he speaks of preparing the " next war." He does not, like M. Zimmermann, allude to the good relations which might be entertained in the future between the Empire and a restored Belgium; but he quotes with relish his master Machiavelli when he speaks of the necessity of getting rid of King Albert, even by death.

Now, how can we explain this apparent contradiction? How is it that the language of the faithful servant differs so much from that of his master?

Several papers which are in close connection with the Wilhelmstrasse, feeling the difficulty of the problem, have tried to explain it away either by questioning the authorship of the Mémoire, or by implying that, since he wrote it,* General von Bissing might have altered his views. Such criticisms were answered conclusively by Hr. M. W. Bacmeister in the *Bergisch Märkische Zeitung*, by Dr. Stresemann in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, and by the art critic Cornelius Gurlitt in the *Deutsche Kurier* (June 5th, 1917).† The private letters of von Bissing addressed to Cornelius Gurlitt and Dr. Stresemann repeat in other words the conclusions of the Testament. Since the Stresemann letter is dated January 14th, 1917, there is no reason whatever to believe that von Bissing's opinion might have changed before his death. As to the authorship of the Testament, it is enough to point out the sentence in which the ex-Governor alludes to this document: "I have at home a memorandum written by me, for myself, in which I study . . . . the question of Belgium's future."

There is only one explanation left to us if we wish to clear up this mystery: While writing his political testament General von Bissing expresses merely his own ideas, and does not in the least engage the

* The Memorandum was written towards the end of 1915.

† See Appendix, pages 30-36.

responsibility of the German Government. The memorandum must not be taken too seriously. It is the work of a dilettante indulging in a literary essay on the future of Belgium as a kind of relaxation to lighten the burden of his toilsome administrative work. It does not express faithfully the aims of the German policy pursued in Belgium. It is written in the margin of history.

But if we are to accept this explanation, we are confronted with endless and insuperable difficulties. We cannot very well forget that the author, whose ideas were well-known in Germany, had been especially chosen by the Kaiser to represent him, and that he enjoyed the special favour of his master to his last day. In his letter to Stresemann he declares a few weeks before his death that, if health is restored to him, he hopes " to take up again the direction of Belgian affairs in his Majesty's name and according to his wish." Besides, the solemn tone of this letter seems in complete contradiction with our supposition. The ideas expressed in the testament are spoken of as being the outcome of the meditation of a dying man, and, which is more important still, as *having inspired every act of his policy in Belgium during his period of administration.*

On the other hand, how can we reconcile the idea that von Bissing was not in complete agreement with the Kaiser and his Government with the fact that his successor, General von Falkenhausen, has declared over and over again, *since the publication of the memorandum*, that he intends to follow in his predecessor's footsteps?

Which are we, then, to believe? The German Government's recent ambiguous declarations about a defensive war and a restored Belgium, or the glaring confession of the Kaiser's faithful servant about further annexation and the enslavement of the martyred country? Which are we to believe: the *words* of Germany, smiling innocently on benevolent neutrals and artless pacifists, or the *acts* of Germany crushing relentlessly the last drop of life and hope out of the conquered provinces?

It is not for us to answer. Perhaps the reader will be in a better position to do so after reading the following pages.

In order to draw attention to a number of the more striking points in von Bissing's memorandum, we have printed them in italics.

GENERAL VON BISSING'S TESTAMENT

IT is a curious fact that in enemy countries, in France and England particularly, the men at the helm express themselves quite freely regarding their war aims, in spite of the reverses suffered on the various fronts. As at the outbreak of this world-war, which is constantly extending its scope, so to-day the parcelling-out or annihilation of Germany is demanded; and this although German armies have made victory a matter of habit, as it were, and are in firm possession of huge expanses of enemy country.

Without paying the slightest heed to the military situation, or hesitating at the sacrifice of treasure and men to which the powers allied against us vainly committed themselves, the anti-German press is without exception blinded by a strange kind of self-hypnotism. The extravagance of the war aims of our opponents, who set as little value on our own successes as on those already won by our allies, obviously makes it impossible to dream of a peace in the near future which shall be both honourable and acceptable to Germany.

In defence of her independence, and to assure her future, Germany must continue the struggle till the moment when she will be in a position to compel peace, sword in hand—a peace that will secure her ends and, if possible, be a lasting one. Only then

will it be fitting to particularise our peace terms: of this many Germans, the Imperial Chancellor* among them, are convinced, though our enemies hold the opposite view.

Ordinary prudence leads us to avoid dividing opinion at home in regard to these serious problems, namely: What guarantees must we exact from both the Eastern and the Western Powers? How shall we best protect ourselves, politically and in a military sense? How shall we get what is demanded by the exigencies of our economic conditions? Even if our enemies—because they try to raise illusory hopes and to deceive us as to their waning strength† and confidence—were to interpret as weakness our silence with regard to our war aims, yet, out of respect for neutrals whom the Entente endeavours at one time to influence and at another threatens, we must persist in this silence till we are in a position to speak categorically (*bis wir so wirkungsvoll wie möglich auftreten können*).

The statements made by the Chancellor in reply to questions raised by the social-democrats should also have quieted those people who demand that our war aims be made public, so that the German people may know why it must go on fighting and subject itself to fresh sacrifices. But I doubt whether it will ever be possible to bring conviction to circles which desire an immediate peace, either because they cherish the illusory idea of reconciliation being a matter of practical politics, or because they are impatient for a peace which, as premature, could only

*Von Bethmann Hollweg.

† It is necessary to bear in mind the date of the Memorandum. Von Bissing came to the conclusion that the Allies' strength was waning in 1915 !

be a transitory one. In these circles, composed wholly of social-democrats, the determination of our people to carry through the task to which they have set their hand is overlooked, while the strength of England's resistance is exaggerated. These folk therefore believe that England will never decide to make peace until we have evacuated Belgium and restored it to its pre-war condition—Belgium, almost the whole of which we have managed to conquer after fierce fighting and countless sacrifices.

I will not enter into the disputed question whether England is invincible, and whether she possesses so much strength that, notwithstanding the threatening of the English world-Empire, and notwithstanding the ever-multiplying signs that England's vital nerve has been struck in the West and in the East, she can still stake everything in order to tear Belgium from us, in order to force us to restore Belgium to Anglo-French influence, and in order also to achieve the recovery by Belgium of her original frontiers, which in future will not be on the Channel but be pushed forward to the Eastern frontier of Belgium. *I intend only to expand the views which I have already expressed, and to speak of the "dira necessitas," or rather the sacred duty, that we should retain Belgium for our influence and sphere of power, and in the interests of Germany's security that we should not give Belgium up.* My confident hope needs, indeed, still to be realised—that the final military decision shall constitute victory for us. But we must already be quite clear about the fact that a restored Belgium, whether declared a neutral country or not, will not only be forced over naturally into the camp of our enemies, but will be actually drawn over by them. Even if one liked to cling to illusions about

reconciliation, and even if one were able to create guarantees by treaties ever so good, Belgium will in every respect be developed and employed as a concentration area and outpost position for our enemies.

I shall now indicate the strategic importance of Belgium for a future war. In order to be able to conduct the present war offensively at all, the German Supreme Command was forced to march through Belgium, and in this process the right wing of the German Army had to push itself laboriously along the edge of the Dutch province of Limburg. Strategically, the objective of the present war, as regards the Western theatre, should consist in our obtaining elbow room, in order that in any new war whatever we should be able to operate with our army against France and England. If the result of the present war were the continued existence of an independent Belgian State, the operations would have to be conducted differently and under greater difficulties, than at the beginning of the present war; for the aim of France and England will be, in conjunction with an allied or strongly influenced Belgium, to anticipate the German Army. It will, therefore, rightly be asked whether in such circumstances it can be possible to guarantee the freedom of operations of the German right wing, and whether the advance of these groups of armies to conduct a new war offensively is possible.

But the present war has also shown that the possession of the German industrial areas is a vital question for our ability to hold out and for an energetic conduct of the war; they cannot possibly be protected unless we hold and defend an area in advance of the Rhine. In this respect the present German frontier is not enough. A Belgium fortified by the

military strength of England and France is a definite menace to our industrial districts, whose factories are so important for the provision of our army. If England continues to dominate Belgium in times of peace, she will not shrink from the attempt to force Holland—just as she has now forced Greece—to abandon her neutrality, or to make herself serviceable for the military operations of England. It is, therefore, requisite to secure for all time, by far advanced defensive lines, the auxiliary resources indispensable for our conduct of war, and so to guarantee the freedom of operation of our right wing, and to widen in desirable fashion the area of our concentration and advance.

Before leaving the sphere of military strategy, I must also refer to the fact that the Belgian industrial districts are of great value, not only in peace, but also in the event of war. A neutral Belgium, or a Belgium made subject to Anglo-French influence, with her munition factories, her metal industry and her coal, strengthens the fighting force and power of resistance of the country in the same way as our industrial districts do for us. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to prevent Belgian industry from serving the armament policy of our enemies. *The advantages which we have been able during the present war to obtain from Belgian industry, by the removal of machinery and so on, are as important as the disadvantages which our enemies have suffered through lack of this addition to their fighting strength.*

When one considers the importance of Belgium as the theatre of our armies' advance, and as territory which favours our further operations, both offensively and defensively, there can be no further

doubt that a frontier which is quite falsely described as the line of the Meuse, and is to be protected by the fortresses of Liége and Namur, is inadequate. No, our frontier—in the interest also of our sea power—must be pushed forward to the sea.

The immediate importance of the Belgian industrial districts for our conduct of war by no means exhausts the subject. The war of weapons will in future be accompanied by a harder economic war than is the case to-day. Without coal what would have become of our policy of industrial exchange, not only with Holland, but also with far distant northern countries? *The annual Belgian production of 23,000,000 tons of coal has given us a monopoly on the Continent, which has helped to maintain our vitality.* In addition to these factors, which are of importance in a new war, the protection of our economic interests in Belgium, even in time of peace, is of inestimable importance. A Belgium whose independence is restored will never be neutral, but will submit to the protection of France and England. If we do not hold Belgium, administer Belgium in future for our interests, and protect Belgium by force of arms, our trade and industry will lose the position that they have won in Belgium, and perhaps will never recover them. The threat to German interests at Antwerp is obvious, and the result will be inevitable the moment Germany gives up Belgium. There can be no doubt that this country will enter into close economic union with England and France as soon as it feels itself independent once more. The Belgian Government and the politicians who have fled to London are working quite openly for this object. We shall of course never desire to kill Belgian industry, but by the imposition of special

laws we must bring it under the same conditions of production as German industry. We can incorporate Belgian industry in our own industrial organisations, and so, in our own interest, make it a lever for the fixing of prices in the world-market. If we lost Antwerp we should lose not only the port and our influence over railway rates, etc., but above all we should lose the powerful influence which Antwerp possesses as a trade and money centre, especially in South America. All these forces would naturally turn against us as soon as they were released.

History has already shown how little trust could be placed in a neutral Belgium before the war and at the beginning of the war, and if, as one must, one appreciates the value of such historic truths, we can never allow ourselves to be induced to let Belgium, at the conclusion of peace, revive as a neutral country. *Just as was the case before the war, a neutral Belgium, or an independent Belgium based upon treaties of a different kind, will succumb to the disastrous influence of England and France, and to the effort of America to exploit Belgian resources. Against all this our only weapon is the policy of power, and this policy must see to it that the Belgian population, now still hostile to us, shall adapt itself and subordinate itself, if only gradually, to the German domination.* It is also necessary that, by a peace which will secure the linking up of Belgium with Germany, we shall be able to give the necessary protection to the Germans who have settled in the country. This protection will be of quite special importance to us for the future battle of the world-markets. In the same way, it is only by complete domination of Belgium that we can utilise for Ger-

man interests the capital created by Belgian savings and the Belgian companies which already exist in large numbers in the countries of our enemies. We must keep under our control the considerable Belgian accumulations of capital in Turkey, the Balkans and China.

Among the German interests in Belgium is also the Flemish movement, which has already made good progress; it would be struck an incurable blow if we do not extend our policy of power over Belgium. We have among the Flemings many open and very many still undeclared friends, who are ready to join the great circle of German world-interests. That will also be very important for the future policy of Holland. But as soon as we remove our protecting hand the Flemish movement will be branded by the Walloons and Frenchlings as pro-German, and will be completely suppressed. The Flemish question is not yet settled, and I do not entertain any rash hopes of seeing the Flemings lighten our task of governing Belgium. We must do everything without delay to repress boundless hopes on the part of the Flemings. Some of them dream of an independent State of Flanders, with a King to govern it, and of complete separation. *It is true that we must protect the Flemish movement, but never must we lend a hand to make the Flemings completely independent.* The Flemings, with their antagonistic attitude to the Walloons, will as a Germanic tribe constitute a strengthening of Germanism.

Belgium must be seized and held, as it now is, and as it must be in future. It is only by the most simple possible solution of the Belgian problem that we shall satisfy an important condition of our future position in the world. If we abandon part of Bel-

gium, or if we make a part of it, such as the territory of Flanders, into an independent Flemish State, we shall not only be creating considerable difficulties for ourselves, but we shall be depriving ourselves of the considerable advantages and aids which can be afforded us only by Belgium as a whole under German administration. *If only on account of the necessary bases for our fleet, and in order not to cut off Antwerp from the Belgian trade area, it is necessary to have the adjacent hinterland.*

Thus, at the conclusion of peace, we shall find opportunity, after a century, to repair the mistakes of the Vienna Congress. In 1871, by the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, which Prussia even at the time of the Vienna Congress wanted to claim for herself, we repaired the first of those mistakes. It is our business now to put aside hesitation and ideas of reconciliation, and not to fall into new mistakes. Gneisenau said:

"We must demand the cession of all territories and fortresses whose rivers flow into the Rhine, the Moselle, the Meuse, the Scheldt, and the Lys. The line Calais-Bâle is the only frontier against France which guarantees us security against a disturbed, warlike, and capable people."

Blücher complained after the conclusion of peace in 1815:

"This peace is a miserable patchwork, thanks to which Prussia and Germany stand betrayed before the whole world."

The poet Ernst Moritz Arndt demanded the natural frontiers from Dunkirk to Bâle. Among German claims he counted Flanders, Calais, Bruges, Ghent, Brabant, Brussels, Louvain, Antwerp and the Meuse districts. The lessons of a century and the

events of the present war have proved how right was the judgment of Gneisenau and Blücher.

Now we have an unique opportunity at the coming conclusion of peace to make good our losses, and we must do it because, in consequence of our own great development, Belgium has become still more important for us than ever. If we do not show ruthlessness and firmness, in order to wring the necessary respect for us from England, if we give way, if we withdraw to the Meuse line or make any agreement about Antwerp, we shall be exposed to the world as weaklings, diminish our great successes in the Balkans, and injure our prestige in Turkey and throughout Islam, in spite of our admirable successes in arms.

It is only by remaining in Belgium that we shall force the English to recognise our equality with them. England must not remain master of the Belgian coast. She must be prevented from controlling an area which can be used as the starting point of a new and overwhelming Anglo-French offensive. Here lies the guarantee for the only proper relationship with England, and so for a lasting peace. The same thing applies to France, whose policy of expansion, pursued since the times of Louis XIV., we have now definitely defeated. As soon as we go out of Belgium, I am convinced that not only will English and French influence be preponderant, but the military union of English and French troops will take place. That means in a coming war that more than 1,000,000 soldiers will stand ready on our present frontier or on the Meuse line for defence or for attack.

We must keep Belgium, as France formerly tried to keep it against England. The importance of

Belgium for Germany as regards *Machtpolitik* has been proved for 800 years. As long as Germany was powerful she had Belgium mainly under her influence. For a stronger Germany Belgium is again a vital question, because Belgium as a free country constitutes, together with Holland, the English gate of invasion on the Continent. We must not in a new war again have to reckon with the English holding their troops in readiness for Ostend and Antwerp, to support the Belgian Army.

I will only allude briefly to the grave crises in domestic politics which surrender of Belgium must produce in Germany. The majority of the people would not understand our abandonment of fruits that had long been in our hand—the result of our tremendous, bloody victory. The war will deprive us of at least 1,000,000 men in the prime of life, and rob our industry of a great part of our best workmen. The people have a right to see their hopes realised, and so there would be deep dissension if they were disappointed. Moreover, our diplomatic failures in the last twenty years have already had a very bad effect among the people, and the fear finds ever louder expression that diplomacy will spoil what the sword has won. This time, after such enormous sacrifices, we cannot take the risk of such charges again being spread abroad. We must achieve the war-aim which seems to every plain man to be absolutely necessary. In Belgium we really have to do not merely with the smallest claims that can be justified militarily, but with questions that are vital for the future of the German people and the German Empire.

Anybody who, as I do, advocates with complete conviction and energy the retention of Belgium is

also obliged to be quite clear about the difficulties and objections which may have to be overcome in order thoroughly to justify this energetic demand. I shall not discuss the views of those who dream that the German Government is bound by the declaration made at the beginning of the war that Germany will conduct the war not for conquests, but only for the protection of the Fatherland. *The conquest of Belgium has simply been forced upon us*, and consideration of future possibilities has led to the logical conclusion that we absolutely must demand the protection of Germany by the extension of the German frontiers in the West. The objection that we must keep Germany an unadulterated National State, and that it would constitute a weakening of the national unity of Germany if we were to take into Germany so and so many millions of inhabitants of a country with a different language—such objections seem to me mere phrases. *Germany can remain German and retain its German feeling, if we draw into our sphere of power a country which has been penetrated through and through by Germanic tribes—for even the Walloons have been made French only by time —and if, with clear and sure appreciation of the facts, we see to it that German intellect and German energy become domiciled where French influence has hitherto provided for the gallicization of the country.* Germany's tasks are, of course, great and difficult, if Belgium submits and is incorporated. But Germany is strong enough, and it is to be hoped that, especially after this war, she will have plenty of efficient men to do in Belgium, in a German sense, what unfortunately was not done in Alsace and Lorraine. Surely we shall have learnt from the mistakes that were made, and *we shall never again have*

recourse to the vacillating policy of conciliation which was so disadvantageous not only in Alsace-Lorraine, but also in Poland. Of course, no people which has been appointed to play a creative part in the history of the world will find doves dropping already roasted into its mouth. A people which, during the war, has achieved such brilliant things in the trenches, in the Army Command, and in all branches of economic life, will have forces enough at its disposal to solve the difficult, but assuredly not insuperable, problems of peace.

Church questions in Belgium have often been described as extremely serious. I admit that precisely the Germanic provinces of Belgium, which once defended their Protestantism so heroically, are to-day far more convinced adherents of the Catholic Church than are the easily-moved Walloons; any German statesman who is appointed to control the German administration in Belgium must realise that Catholicism is, and will remain, a strong and living force in Belgium, and that among the most important requirements for successful German work is an intelligent regard for the Catholic Church and its disciples.

The problem of our influence upon the schools can be solved in agreement with the clergy, if obligatory religious teaching is introduced in the same way as the general obligation to attend school; there are a number of points of contact and agreement between the future German administration and the Catholic clergy, which must learn more and more to understand that the Catholic Church enjoys, and can enjoy, under the power of Germany, protection quite different from that which it will have if Belgium, under French influence, turns towards a completely

Radical philosophy. One knows that Belgian Socialism is strongly influenced by French Socialism, and Vandervelde has often proclaimed the revolution as the completion of the religion of freedom and equality. It is known that Social Democracy has become a strong factor for the gallicization of Belgium. The clergy, however, will have to associate itself with the social reforms which must be taken in hand immediately after the conclusion of peace, and in this the clergy will have to go hand in hand with the German administration.

The question of the form in which the linking up of Belgium with Germany must be accomplished causes much racking of brains in diplomatic circles, and in the studies of the constitutional lawyers, and the question " With whom shall we conclude peace in order to make the right of conquest into a constitutional right?" has often been asked, and is certainly not easy to answer. Hitherto, it is true, the Royal Government of Belgium and the King himself have not adhered to the undertakings of the Quadruple Entente not to enter into peace negotiations and not to conclude peace except jointly. But this reserve, which may soon be abandoned, does not open up any prospect that we shall ever be able to conclude with the King of the Belgians and his Government a peace by which Belgium will remain in the German sphere of power, and it is impossible that the Quadruple Entente, over the heads of its Allies, shall ever accept our peace demands with regard to Belgium. *It only remains for us, therefore, to avoid during the peace negotiations all discussion about the form of the annexation, and to apply nothing but the right of conquest.* It is true that dynastic considerations have an importance which is not to be

under-estimated. For, in view of our just and ruthless procedure, the King of the Belgians will be deposed, and will remain abroad as an aggrieved enemy. We must put up with that, and it is to be regarded almost as a happy circumstance that necessity compels us to leave dynastic considerations entirely out of account. A King will never voluntarily hand over his country to the conqueror, and *Belgium's King can never consent to abandon his sovereignty or to allow it to be restricted.* If he did so his prestige would be so undermined that he would have to be regarded not as a support, but as an obstacle, to German interests. *On the most various occasions the English have described the right of conquest as the healthiest and simplest kind of right, and we can read in Machiavelli that he who desires to take possession of a country will be compelled to remove the King or Regent, even by killing him.*

These are grave decisions, but they must be taken, for we are concerned with the welfare and the future of Germany, and concerned also with reparation for the war of destruction that has been directed against us.

For years to come we must maintain the existing state of dictatorship. It is the only form of administration, based as it is upon military resources, which can be chosen, in order to gain time for the gradual and methodical building up of the most appropriate possible administration.

One must beware of wanting to determine—perhaps in a peace concluded in 1916—what can only be ripe for decision after decades have passed. If we bind ourselves too soon, it will be difficult to take measures to counteract those binding decisions. We

must preserve patience and method in our procedure. Thence will proceed, in addition to the factors of tranquillisation and ever-increasing order in the machinery of administration, the linguistic, ecclesiastical, economic, judicial and military regulations, which, indeed, will make necessary the amendment of a number of Belgian laws.

The completion of the annexation will be regarded by many Flemings, and by a great part of the Walloons, as a release from uncertainty and from vain hopes. Both races will be able to return to the life that will be rendered possible by renewed opportunity for trade and pleasure. During such a period of transition the Flemings will allow themselves to be led back from French tyranny to their free, although not easily controlled, Low German way of living. The Walloons can, and must, decide during this period whether they will adapt themselves to the definitely altered state of affairs, or whether they prefer to leave Belgium. *He who remains in the country must declare his allegiance to Germany, and after a certain time must declare his allegiance to Germanism.* In connection with this it cannot be tolerated that wealthy Belgians shall leave the country, and nevertheless draw profit from their possessions in Belgium. Expropriation is absolutely necessary, in order to prevent such a state of things as exists in Alsace-Lorraine to the present day. *I hope that we shall be strong*, not only with the sword, but also with statesmanlike illumination and preparation and all the things necessary to fruitful administration. *Half measures and a middle course must be condemned most of all.* Lack of determination in the decisive days of German fate will be a grave wrong to the blood that has been shed.

Among such half-measures I include the intention of treating Belgium merely as a pawn, which might be used to recover or extend our colonial possessions. As regards the extension of our colonial possessions, the Belgian Congo comes especially into question. The possession of the Belgian Congo is certainly to be aimed at, and I desire to insist that a German Colonial Empire, whatever its shape, is indispensable for Germany's world policy and expansion of power. But, on the other hand, I am of the opinion that only such frontiers as will contribute to the acquisition of greater freedom on the sea are calculated to make colonial possessions valuable. Consequently, the supporters of the colonial movement must also demand the Belgian coast, together with the Belgian hinterland. If we give up the Belgian coast our Fleet will lack important bases for its share in the protection of our Colonial Empire.

I am conscious that the demand that we shall retain all Belgium and link it up in one form or another with the German sphere of power, is a great aim, which can be achieved only by determined and self-sacrificing courage and by the utmost energy and skill in negotiation. Let us apply a saying of Bismarck that "in policy, if in any sphere, faith moves mountains, and courage and victory are not cause and effect, but identical."

APPENDIX I.

GENERAL VON BISSING'S LETTER* TO DR. STRESEMANN.

Jan. 14,† 1917.

My Dear Herr Stresemann,

I have come here‡ to recover from the effects of severe bronchitis which attacked me about Christmas-time. I hope that I shall recuperate here sufficiently to be able to undertake once more the responsibilities imposed by the position which I held in Belgium.

I see in the *Wiesbadener Zeitung*, which has just come, that on the 7th of January you delivered a lecture at Hanover on "The German Victory and a German Peace." I hope that you will not think me presumptuous in offering you my warmest congratulations on the very correct views which you expressed on that occasion, and that I may be allowed to endorse especially what you said about the future of Belgium.

For some months past no paper or patriotic gathering has dared to connect Belgium in any way with our war-aims. It looked as if, in spite of all the sacrifices Belgium has cost us, in spite of the victories won after so much hard fighting, in spite of our heroic stand on the Western front—which, after all, had no other object than to maintain our

* Published in the *Hamburger Nachrichten*, May 30, 1917, evening edition.

† Von Bissing died on April 18, 1917. ‡ Wiesbaden.

hold on Belgium—that country had no importance for Germany. It looked as if we were prepared, when the time for making peace should come, to restore Belgium to the status she had before the war. Anyone who knows as well as I do how important Belgium is to Germany politically, economically and strategically, must see how grievous a mistake we should make were we to conclude a peace which does not leave us masters of Belgium; for, whatever happens, Belgium cannot be allowed to remain under Franco-British influence but, on the contrary, must be used to enhance our power. Possibly the world never has seen and never will see again an instance of a conqueror being so greatly strengthened by his conquests as we should be by winning Belgium.

You and Herr Bassermann—who has on many occasions expressed very sound views on political matters—have recognised how important Belgium is to us, and have had the courage to lay stress on the fact. I personally may not say openly all that I think on this subject, yet I go much further than you do. But I am all the more grateful to you for having laid down so clearly, persuasively and vigorously, the principles underlying the reasons which compel us to absorb Belgium.

There lies in my house a memorandum composed by me for myself alone, which deals more precisely and exhaustively with the future of Belgium, and the conclusion I arrive at is this, that, if we do not get Belgium into our sphere of power, and if we do not govern it in German fashion (and use it in German fashion) the war is lost, and do not let anyone be led astray by those who think superficially about the Belgian question, who are willing to put up with guarantees of a paper kind, and are content with a frontier fixed at "the Meuse line," which can never in any sense satisfy us as a frontier suited to our needs.

We must push as far northwards as possible the frontier which in future will protect Belgium from England and France. As the coast is part of that frontier, the coast must be our frontier. I was delighted to see this point brought forward at a recent meeting of the Navy League. This will release us from the "wet triangle" (aus dem nassen Dreieck) and make it possible for us to protect our colonies when we have rescued them from Britain's claws.

For more than two years past my policy has been guided by such consideration of what may happen in the future. Great difficulties have often been put in the way of my policy, and the policy of the fist alone has been set up as the right policy. I, however, have quietly sought to establish connexions, and although these connexions have often been broken, and what remains of them may only exist in secret, they will bear fruit as soon as Germany is able to speak the power-word of conquest, to recoup herself for her heavy sacrifices and set up guarantees without which her future would be endangered.

This is how my Flemish policy has been guided and carried out. In the same way I have conducted my Church policy with a wise moderation. Perhaps it would have been easier for me had I adopted a *Kultur-Kampf* policy, but we shall need the Church when some day we want to develop German ways and German activity in Belgium.

These words, which have been drawn from me only by your splendid lecture, are those of one who does not know whether his health will allow him to return to a post where heavy responsibility awaits him. If, as is possible, God gives him back his strength, you may be certain that I shall always be a firm supporter of those who—as you did in your address—are able to assess and describe the Belgian problem with an acute perception of what the future of Germany demands.

Please excuse me for not going further into this very important subject. I am still ill and weak, and cannot yet write or even think as well as I hope to be able to do soon when this long holiday with which his Majesty the Emperor and King has been graciously pleased to honour me, has given me sufficient strength to administer Belgium in his name and in accordance with his wishes.

If you see Herr Bassermann kindly give him my kindest regards, and please accept my best wishes.

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) FREIHERR VON BISSING.

General.

APPENDIX II.

LETTER OF HR. M. W. BACMEISTER.*

"The *Magdeburgische Zeitung* and the *Weser Zeitung*, two papers in close touch with the Wilhelmstrasse, have expressed the opinion that General Freiherr von Bissing, the second Governor-General of Belgium, has certainly not acted up to the opinions expressed by him in his memorandum about Belgium, which appeared simultaneously in my review, *Das Grössere Deutschland*, and in the *Bergisch Märkische Zeitung*.

This is a foolish conjecture which will in no way detract from the importance of von Bissing's memorandum, as I have it from well-informed quarters and am authorised to state that, to the day of his death, von Bissing remained faithful to those opinions as set forth in his memorandum."

* Written to the *Bergisch Märkische Zeitung* and reproduced in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, May 26, 1917, evening edition.

APPENDIX III.

EXTRACTS FROM VON BISSING'S LETTER* TO HR. CORNELIUS GURLITT, THE ART CRITIC.

"I agree with you that one cannot speak of the Belgian nation as such: and I also share your opinion as to the worthlessness of a referendum, and your belief that 'the force of arms is the only thing able to secure peace.' Peace cannot be secured by agreements on paper, but only by positive and adequate guarantees. Even now (the letter is dated February 17, 1915) the Flemings are paying serious attention to the matter of how best to turn present conditions to account with a view to the future consolidation of Flanders. It would be impracticable to separate Greater Flanders from Wallonia (the course advised by Gurlitt). I believe with you that an independent Belgium with a predominating French element would in the future adopt just the same view of neutrality as she has held hitherto. I agree with you on this point: that in the future as heretofore we shall have to reckon with a coalition being made against us, and that it will be at least as strong a one as before. Your idea that as few foreign races as possible should be admitted to the German union is right from one point of view, but this principle is not always compatible with rearrangements of the Empire's frontiers and fortresses."

* Taken from the *Deutsche Kurier*, June 5, 1917.

Further on, von Bissing pronounces against a breaking-up of Belgium, to avoid future complications. He maintains that, on the conclusion of peace, "We must make it clear at the outset that *Belgium belongs to us by right of conquest*, and defer to a *later* occasion the decision as to *what form self-government shall take*. We must avoid creating a situation like that in Alsace-Lorraine: the annexation of Belgium must not prove a burden to Germany."

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